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SUBJECT: IRANIAN INFLUENCE COMPLICATES IRAQ CONUNDRUM

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CLASSIFIED BY: Louis L. Bono, Director, REO Basrah, Department  
of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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11. (S/NF) Summary. Two close contacts of the Regional Embassy Office (REO) Basrah provided disturbing reports of increasing Iranian efforts to destabilize southern Iraq at a time that MND(SE) is preparing to reposture its military forces and turn Maysan and Basrah provinces over to Iraqi control (PIC). Abu Muslim, a former member of the Interim Iraqi National Council, provided detailed descriptions of legitimate goods as well as money, weapons and trained fighters crossing almost unhindered from Iran into Maysan. Majid al-Sari, a Defense Ministry adviser, said Iran has trained at least 10,000 suicide bombers to attack targets inside Iraq. Al-Sari took the Coalition partners to task for having done a poor job of reaching out to the middle class and moderate political groups of Basrah, while Iran has increased support for its proxies, the Shia Islamic political parties. End Summary.

#### IRANIAN INFLUENCE GROWING IN SOUTHERN IRAQ

12. (S) On January 21, Abu Muslim, a prominent civic leader from Maysan Province, and on January 23, Majid al-Sari, an adviser to the Defense Ministry on security matters in southern Iraq, made disturbing reports about growing Iranian influence in southern Iraq. Abu Muslim said cross-border smuggling with Iran is booming in consumer goods and contraband weapons. He said that trucks laden with fruits, vegetables, construction materials, televisions, refrigerators, furniture, as well as weapons and drugs, roll from Iran into Maysan at numerous border crossing points with nary a glance from the Iraqi customs police. He added that smuggling is rife in the marshes that inundate large stretches of Maysan's border with Iran.

13. (S) Abu Muslim said that Iran is trying to destabilize Iraq because it fears the U.S. presence in its western neighbor. In his view, Iran is working through many of the Iraqi Shia political parties, such as SCIRI, Hezbollah Harakat, and the Office of the Martyr Sadr, to thwart U.S. efforts in Iraq. He said an Iranian paramilitary organization, named Kar Gaa Quds

and led by Hameed Takaoui, trains, arms and pays five-man guerrilla units to carry out assassinations and intimidation inside Iraq. (Ref A.) The commander of each unit is paid \$500 per month and the four others each \$300 per month. Abu Muslim, whose given name is Hussein Jaloob al-Saadi, is the founder of the al-Huda Foundation for Strategic Studies, which promotes democracy and tolerance.

#### MAJID AL-SARI CRITICIZES COALITION FOR NEGLECTING MODERATES

¶4. (S) In his meeting with the REO director, Majid al-Sari echoed Abu Muslim's comments about Iranian destabilization efforts that channel agents, training and money into Iraq. (Ref B.) He said Iran is doing a more effective job of supporting its proxies in Iraq than do the United States and the United Kingdom, which he said have minimal contact with the middle class and moderate political groups of Basrah. He said many moderate citizens of Basrah are forced to declare their allegiance to extremist political groups in order to stay alive.

He observed that the broadcast media of Basrah are dominated by television stations operated by pro-Iranian Islamic parties. He said that the Coalition and its allies should operate a television station to put out information that would counter-balance the heated rhetoric of the pro-Iranian Islamists.

¶5. (S) Al-Sari said that Iran has trained about 10,000 suicide bombers to invade Iraq if the United States attacked Iran. As to who might be able to assume leadership of Basrah after the Coalition relinquishes provincial control, al-Sari said a number of tribal leaders who fought Iran in the 1980s and some Iraqi Army officers could provide effective leadership. He declined to name names and did not respond when asked his opinion of Basrah Governor al-Wa'eli.

¶6. (S) Comment. Information provided by Abu Muslim and Majid al-Sari suggests that Iran is ramping up its drive to assert greater influence in southern Iraq at a time that the Coalition is looking for ways to reduce their presence. The introduction

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of the Iranian factor makes finding a solution to the Iraq conundrum more complex. End comment.  
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